

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022

Remarks During a Meeting With Leaders of Caribbean Nations and an Exchange With Reporters in Los Angeles, California

June 9, 2022

The Vice President. Welcome, Mr. President. We are in the midst of a discussion—a family conversation—with our colleagues, our friends who are members of CARICOM and, of course, the Dominican Republic.

We have been engaged in a very candid conversation about the challenges that this region—our neighbors in this region—are experiencing: an urgent need for resources, for collaboration, for cooperation, and for consideration of the challenges they face and a way that we will help.

And the range of topics has included the imminent, urgent matter of food insecurity. It has been about the development of climate finance and getting rid of some of the obstacles to access to finance for these nations, obstacles which—I believe some are unnecessary and can be eliminated.

And also, we have talked about security issues. And in particular, one of the last points that was made about—was made about guns, and something that you are an extraordinary leader on, of course, in our country, and the need to take that seriously in terms of the trafficking of guns and what that has meant for these countries.

I have underscored in this meeting our commitment as an administration, your commitment as President, to putting time and resources into strengthening this relationship, because we are neighbors and these countries are important to us for many reasons that include a shared history and shared values.

I present the President of the United States.

[At this point, President Chan Santokhi of Suriname, who was seated at President Biden's right, turned on the President's microphone.]

The President. There you go. Anyway, thank you for letting me crash the meeting.

Look, folks, I thought it was important that I come by, because I think when you have everyone from Presidents to Prime Ministers to Foreign Ministers here, this should be principal to principal. The Vice President has been kind enough to take on managing this part of the portfolio for me, just as I did for—when I was Vice President for my former President.

And I—but it is something that—and I've asked her to personally do this, but it is my responsibility. And I want you to know that on a leader-to-leader level, like we did, whether it's at—dealing with climate in Europe or here, it's—it should be person to person. And you should have access to me, and I hope I can have access to you as well.

You know, there's a lot to talk about. And I don't know what you—were you talking about it all in front of the press here?

The Vice President. No.

The President. Because——

The Vice President. ——we had a bit of a conversation——

The President. ——I love the press——

The Vice President. ——in front of the press, but it's—*[laughter]*.

The President. —but I'd like to get into, if you're willing, for a few minutes, how—let you know my intention is to intensify the relationship with the Caribbean. And I mean that sincerely. You're critically important to us in every way, and I hope we're important to you.

And I think that there's a means by which we can maybe undo some of the damage done the previous 4 years, when it wasn't very much taken seriously—the relationships.

But you know, I know most of you represent middle- and high-income countries, and it's put you in a difficult position, which cuts you off from any of the international financial tools that are out there. I think we've got some answers to be able to be significantly helpful in that regard, which I'd like to talk with you about in a few minutes. And I think that, you know, we can better prepare for natural disasters and rebuild after you get hit, increase resilience for future crises, including dealing with—there will be other pandemics that are coming down the line.

And so there's a lot that I think that we can and should do. But I'm here not to tell you anything, but to hear what's on your minds. This is a partnership. It's not—I'm not—we're not here to dictate. We're here to—I'm here to learn, as well as to tell you what we're prepared to do and what—you can ask me additional things you think we should or shouldn't be doing.

And, for example, you know, we're going to—I think we can work with you to strengthen the region's ability to adapt to climate change; improve collaboration at the government-to-government level on great—you know, unlock greater private investment for—from around the world and from the United States and the hemisphere in the Caribbean; and our new U.S.-Caribbean Partnership To Address Climate Crisis, which I think are going to help enhance your climate resilience and your energy security; and to meet some sustainable development goals.

So I think there's an awful lot we can do. And I think, as the gentlelady from Barbados will tell you—we discussed this at the climate conference there—you know, I think we have to understand that the major countries of the world, not just us, have an obligation to help the rest of the world—not just the Caribbean, but the African continent and other places—to deal with the consequences of the damage done by climate by the wealthy countries. Why we've—if we've developed—we've cleared our land, we've planted, we've—you know, we've done all this stuff.

And now to come along—and the infrastructure you need to deal with your—the consequences of climate are going to be incredibly expensive. And I think we have an obligation to step up and help meet those obligations, meet those infrastructure changes, and so much more.

So that's what I'd like to talk with you about, and I'd like to find out what's on your mind. But thank you for being here.

And I think, with your permission, I'd like to listen to what's on your minds and maybe follow up on this as we can.

Summit of the Americas

Q. Any concerns about the boycott?

The President. No.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. at the Los Angeles Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to former President Barack Obama; and Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados. A reporter referred to the decisions by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico, President Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez of El Salvador, President Xiomara Castro as President of Honduras, and President Alejandro Giammattei Falla of Guatemala not to attend the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, CA.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Los Angeles, CA; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Caribbean nations, leaders.

Locations: Los Angeles, CA.

Names: Harris, Kamala D.; Mottley, Mia; Obama, Barack.

Subjects: Barbados : Prime Minister; California : President's visit; Caribbean Nations, relations with U.S.; Energy : Foreign sources; Environment : Climate change; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Natural disasters : Preparedness efforts; Western Hemisphere : Summit of the Americas; White House Office : Vice President.

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